

# The Image of Women in The Story of The Guardians: Study of Feminism by Kyai Abul Fadhol As-Senori

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## ABSTRACT

The awareness to build the image of women positioned as the number two creatures under men does not seem to have gained the roots of the convincing study of the heritage and culture of the archipelago reflected in the stories told in the form of literary works. This paper reveals the image of women from the work of a Muslim figure of the archipelago (*Nusantara*), Abul Fadlol, in his work *Ahlâ al-Musâmarah*. This research is an investigation of literary criticism aimed at understanding cultural structures as assembled by the author through texts in his literary works. The approach in this study is qualitatively descriptive. This paper could portray *Nusantara* women and their significant role in various fields and not only in domestic areas but also in education, by providing facilities to men, even in politics. The story in Abul Fadlol's 1381 H or about 56 years ago has provided an overview of various portraits, including portraits of the relationship between women and men who are still lame in the perspective of feminism. This paper also has looked at the role and position of women using the perspective of Islamic feminism related to the *wilayah* (miracle) of women and polygamy that continues to be interpreted among the Muslim society.

**Keywords:** *Islamic feminism, Abul Fadlol, Nusantara, Image of women.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Awareness of gender equality in this decade is indeed quite encouraging, both among academics and practitioners. The emergence of the Center for Women's Studies and the Center for Gender Studies in various institutions indicates that [1]. However, the awareness to build the image of women positioned as the number two creatures under men does not seem to have gained the roots of the convincing study of the heritage and culture of the archipelago reflected in the stories told in the form of literary works.

The emergence of *Nusantara* literary works inspired by feminism such as the novel "*Azab dan Sengsara*" by Merari Siregar, then *Siti Nurbaya* by Marah Rusli, *Perempuan Berkabung Sorban* by Abidah el-Kheleiq [2] and others and critical study of the work is a symbolic resistance to the patriarchal culture that developed at that time. However, the critical study rooted in the literary work of scholars in the archipelago has not been widely disclosed.

If the literature written mirrors the ideology and thought of the author, then literary criticism is the study of literary works by emphasizing in terms of their judgment [3]. Literary work "*Ahla al-Musâmarah*" by K.

Abul Fadhol (1916-1991 AD) narrates ten guardians and women of the archipelago who are intelligent and play a role in constructing history. This story reinforces the role of women of the archipelago who are fought by the discourse that women are helpless, weak creatures.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of feminism today already has various forms that are quite diverse [4]. Feminism is a topic of conversation for women by including men as creatures who are always envied, as superior beings who always consider women inferior (weak) beings. Feminism is often understood as the struggle for the emancipation of women before men or the system movement against the system that causes women to suffer [5]. Theoretically, the thought of male dominance over women departs from a thesis developed by feminism. Radical feminism also argues that a person's gender determines social status, life experiences, physical and psychological conditions, interests, and values [6].

Abdullah stated that the status of women in the cultural construct of Javanese society was unique, because women have tremendous and high power while playing a role in domestic and public work [7]. Clarisa Adamson shows that the reform in 1998 has opened the

feminist movement of Islamic feminism through interpretation appropriate for the development of science and technology [8]. Arabic-language feminism literature in Indonesia is still limited to the works of Nawal As-Sa'dawi. Anwar Mas'adi conducted a study of literary criticism with the approach of Islamic feminism [9]. Feminist literary criticism combines the variety of literary criticism mentioned by Abrams especially the pattern of expressive criticism from the author in his work and the mimetic pattern with the depiction of women in literary works, as well as the theory of feminism itself [10][11].

Cultural factors become the dominant factors that transform biological factors into social and political problems and ultimately lead to the subordination of women by both public and domestic factors [12]. There is no hierarchical structure of the husband and wife in the family, but a complementary position. The husband is responsible for establishing the family (*qawwam*), the wife is responsible for the survival of the people, in the sense of pregnant and breastfeeding children [13]. Theological feminism in a secular country does not cause problems compared to a country whose population is religious and sensitive to religious issues, such as in Indonesia [14].

Feminism has many varieties, among others: liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist and social feminism, psychoanalysis and gender feminism, existentialist feminism, postmodern feminism, multicultural feminism and ecofeminism [15]. In third-world countries where the majority of the population is many Muslims, a variety of feminism is later referred to as Muslim feminism or Islamic feminism [11]. An Islamic feminism movement is a form of concern about the fact that women in the structure of Islamic social organizations still do not get equality compared to men. Muslim feminists generally seek to deconstruct the historical roots of the injustice experienced by women in their social lives [16]

No religion labels itself as unfair because of its gender, and at the same time, it often criticizes the teachings of other religions regarding its treatment of women [17]. The feminist movement combines women's equal rights in an organized manner to achieve women's human rights. The underlying ideology is the ideology of social transformation that ultimately boils down to creating a world for women [18]. Feminism aims to undermine the dominance of men over women by undermining the cultural structure and laws and rules that place women as half of the perfect beings and women are worthless beings [19].

Muhammad 'Imarah mentions several problems in the treasures of Islamic texts that are debated among the drivers of feminism, among others: In the problem of inheritance, a woman gets half as much as a man's share; The testimony (*shahâdah*) of a woman is judged by half

of the testimony (*shahâdah*) of a man; fewer women of religion and mind; Female leadership [20]. Interpretation of feminism in the Qur'an often involves an appreciation of QS. An-Nisa: 34 [21]. According to Rifat Hassan, this verse shows that men are responsible for providing for the needs of women who have given birth to children and raised them [22].

### 3. METHODS

Based on the theory that treats literary works as historical documents that contain ideas from the author and the re-denial of beliefs [23][24]. This research is an investigation of literary criticism aimed at understanding cultural structures as assembled by the author through texts in his literary works [11]. The approach in this study is qualitatively descriptive. This research code uses understanding and interpretation to present a good description of work [25].

The formal object of this research is the image of women (image of women) in the early days of Islam into the archipelago with an approach to literary criticism of Islamic feminism. There are three aspects of literary criticism research: analysis, interpretation, and evaluation [26]. According to Rutven K.K. The research steps included the identification of female figures and an analysis of the structure of their roles within the family, society, and social environment [19].

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Abul Fadhol (1916-1991 AD) was born in Suwedang Kebonharjo, Jatirogo subdistrict of Tuban. He was born in 1916. He was the son of Abdus Shakur [27]. At the age of 9 years, he has successfully memorized the Qur'an 30 *juz*, which was taken for only two months.

Abul Fadlol started writing works at the age of 11. Initially, by making a summary of the books taught, then write their work [27]. Besides studied with his father, Abul Fadhol also studied with KH. Hashim Asy'ari in Tebuireng Jombang. Although in Tebuireng only about seven months, but his science is comprehensive [28]. Among his students was KH. Hashim Muzadi, KH. Maimun Zubair Sarang, and KH. Abdullah Faqih Langitan.

Abul Fadlol is an important figure of *Nusantara* scholars. We knew him while studying at KH. Abdullah Faqih Langitan, one of Abul Fadhol's students, managed to become a clerical figure. Most of Abul Fadhol's work was taught by KH Abdullah Faqih to his santri between 1994-2000 with *sorogan* methods such as the general hut of *Salafiyah Pesantren*. "*Ahlâ al-Musâmarah*" narrates ten guardians of the spread of Islam in the archipelago in the early days of Islam entered.

Through the story of ten guardians and some female figures in the archipelago that is packed with interest by K. Abul Fadhol in Arabic, the work "*Ahlâ al-Musâmarah*" becomes a symbolic resistance to the stigma that is cultured in the general public who consider that women are weak creatures and only able to become mere *konco wingking* (second being). The author's awareness of his daily life is expressed in the form of literary works. Imagination in a literary work is an imagination built on reality or facts that happen [29].

The stories of the guardians in Javanese society have been told for generations. The story of the guardians becomes the product of various creations. Some pour it into creating a historical, historical-literary, and folklore or legendary story. Pigeaud (1976) called the story of the Wali a legend and made the story one of the sources of Javanese history [30]. A *Nusantara* scholar, Abul Fadhol (1916-1991 AD), poured the legend of the Wali in his work "*Ahlâ al-Musâmarah fî Hikâyât al-Awliyâ' al-Asyrah*".

The story of the Wali compiled by Abul Fadlol in his book "*Ahlâ al-Musâmarah*" revealed the image of women in the early era of Islam entering the archipelago until the collapse of the Majapahit kingdom and the establishment of the Islamic kingdom of Demak. According to the Raffles calendar, the story takes place between the 13th century AD to the 15th century AD, which is between 1250 AD to 1475 AD [31]. Theoretically, Abul Fadlol followed the historical theory of the entry of Islam in Java in the 13th century. According to J.P. Moquette (1912), this theory is built on the tombstone of Sultan Malik Saleh, who died in 1297 AD in Pasai and the tombstone of Maulana Malik Ibrahim, who died in 1419 in Gresik. However, genealogically, Javanese Islam in the book "*Ahlâ al-Musâmarah*" follows Chinese theory, where there is a connection between Javanese Islam and migrants and descendants from Campa. Narrated, after Sayyid Ibrahim As-Samara growing up, he travelled to the corners of the earth until he arrived at a place with the name Campo [32]. Christina S. Handayani and Ardhian Novianto's theory [32] about the differences between women of the archipelago and Western women and the non-enactment of public space for men and private spaces for women in the archipelago. It is reflected in the story revealed in Abul Fadlol's work.

The book by Kyai Abul Fadlol is closed with the conquest of Majapahit kingdom and the establishment of an Islamic kingdom in Demak. Majapahit was conquered by an Islamic army led by 10 Wali, they were 1- Amir Haji (Sunan Qudus), 2- Haji Uthman (Sunan Mayuran), 3- Raden Shahid (Sunan Kalijaga), 4- Raden Prabu, 5- Sayyid Muhsin (Sunan Wilis), 6- Sayid Qasim (Sunan Derajat), 7- Raden Said (Sunan Muria), 8- Raden Paku (Sunan Giri), 9- Raden Fatah (Sunan Demak), 10- Sayid Ibrahim (Sunan Bonang) [32].

Several events told in this book show the role of women in the realm of the public. It is said that after the death of her father, Siti Sarah and her brother, Sayyid Abdul Qadir bin Mualana Ishaq, intended to travel far and travel to the corners of the world. Both are said to go to the land of Aden in Arabia, then return to the land of Kaling until finally, they reached both in the land of Java. Both went to Ampel Surabaya to meet Raden Rahmat bin Sayyid Ibrahim As-Samara, Siti Sarah's uncle [32]. Siti Sarah is then married by Sunan Kalijogo or Raden Shahid bin Raden Syakur. From this marriage, both were given descendants Ruqoiyah, Rafiah and Raden Sayyid [32].

The role of women outside the domestic region is also played by Raden Paku's adoptive mother, Nyai Gedhe. He plays a role in nurturing and is responsible for the education of his adopted children. He raised Raden Paku bin Maulana Ishaq and educated him until Raden Paku became a great figure. Narrated, Nyai Gedhe is the woman who delivered Raden Paku to study to Raden Rahmat in Ampel, and she is also who handed it directly to Raden Rahmat [32]. Raden Paku is then known as Sunan Giri. He married Raden Rahmat's daughter named Murtiah and lived in the Giri Gresik area of East Java [32].

The doctrine that women of religion and their minds are lacking so that they are in the position of subordinate men [20] is not applicable in the story of the guardians appointed by Abul Fadlol. He gives space for women who are broad in religious affairs to become *waliyullah* (lovers of Allah), such as the degree of quality obtained by Nyai Sibolek. He is a famous guardian for his shipwrecks. One of Sibolek's miracles occurred when her husband, who became a mosque muadhin, was ordered to collect reed leaves in Tuban as the roof of the building, but the reed leaves were not taken. In Demak, the construction of the mosque was underway. Sibolek then brought all the reed leaves to the field in Tuban. She then shook his shawl towards the leaves of the reeds, and immediately all the leaves flew up to the Demak mosque that was being built [32].

The miracle of Sibolek also occurred when Demak's troops travelled to invade Majapahit. The forces were resting in Tuban area. One of the two men carriers of the amulets of Demak's army opened it. Whereas previously, it had been ordered so that the amulet was not opened except in the Majapahit region. When it was opened, the contents of the amulet came out, and a strange sound sounded. The man was terrified because he had opened the amulet. He did not dare to continue the journey and finally met him with Sibolek. The man asked for protection from Sibolek so that Demak's team would not arrest him. Sibolek said to him: "Don't be afraid, I will guarantee your security in this area of Ngepun from the people of the government." Finally, the man was safe and stayed there until he died and was buried in Ngepun. That said, now, no ruler or official enters Ngepun unless he

will be deposed, fired, or died, due to Nyai Sibolek's words to keep Ngepun from the people of government [32].

Abul Fadlol seems to have broken down the stigma given to women as a creature that lacks reason and religion through the image of Nyai Sibolek, who reaches the degree of *waliyullah* and the story of his shipwreck. She portrayed a powerful woman who was able to provide security guarantees to men from the government forces.

Women are often socially denigrated in patriarchal societies and subjected to unfair treatment [33]. Martaningrum, Brawijaya's wife, did not obtain this treatment, who converted to Islam. Martaningrum was brought together with Demak's army using a chariot that had been specially prepared for the kings. She was paraded at the front of the troops and accompanied by women who had embraced Islam [32].

Women had obtained the freedom to embrace faith and religion at that time. Martaningrum was able to embrace her faith without being blocked by Brawijaya, her husband. Her husband did not force Martaningrum to flee with her after being besieged by Demak's forces. Brawijaya said to him: "Islamic forces have entered the city, I will flee, do you want to come with me? If you do not come, I will run away and leave you." She replied: "I am just staying here and not going with you [32]. After Brawijaya and his followers fled, there was no one but Martaningrum and his 40 women in his palace. Martaningrum then told the woman to sew Muslim women's clothes and said to them: "Follow me to Islam." When Raden Shahid and Demak's troops entered the kingdom, the women-led by Smartening declared to embrace Islam and wore Muslim women's clothing [32].

In Islam, anyone has no compulsion to embrace a particular religion or belief (QS. Al-Baqarah: 256, Al-Kahfi: 29, Etc.) [21]. Religion or belief that is forced is contrary to the meaning of the belief itself. In the history of prophethood and post-prophethood, also never known coercion for someone to convert to Islam. After a person says two sentences of the shahada, then there is no reason whatsoever to mistreat him, whether he is male or female.

#### **4.1 Female Role**

The role outside the home as the bearer of Islamic da'wah in this story is played by Sayyidah Sarah. Sayyidah Sarah and Abdul Qadir have agreed after his father's death to travel to various parts of the world for months until it reached the Peninsula of Java Island both went to the Surabaya area precisely in the village named Ampel. Here it is clear that the role played by Sayyidah Sarah has crossed domestic boundaries even since then women have reached various countries. A fact that contradicts the mainstream assumption that puts women in domestic areas in the house and should not go out

anywhere, even in Islamic teachings, is also often misunderstood that woman should be at home alone should not even leave the house.

Nyai Gedhe can describe the role of women in the field of education. If a patriarchal culture still assumes that women are not as entitled to education as men get, then this culture is a growing culture told in this story among women. The issue of the importance of education has been realized by men and women equally. It is told in this story that Raden Paku's stepmother, who took care of him, was the one who took him to study at Ampel Surabaya. Nyai Gedhe led Raden Paku to study to Raden Rahmat and go there. After meeting Raden Rahmat, the woman said: "I came to you to give up my son because he was happy to study the religious sciences for you." This fact of Nyai Gedhe shows how much a woman's awareness is about the importance of religious science. This fact also shows a high appreciation of religious science because someone who does not appreciate science and views the importance of science certainly will not care whether his child learns religion.

This essay is an awareness awakened from the phenomenon that developed in his era, especially in the academic environment as told in the story. Abul Fadlol also recounted the role of women in politics, which until recently was considered taboo for women. The women role is as the role of Nyai Sibolek, namely the role of politics in the battle against Majapahit and the battle of Demak. Abul Fadlol has explained the role of women in the struggle in Islamic doctrine to give less space to women in politics as leaders or even just as members in the war forces because, in Fiqh, women are not obliged to wage war or raise swords against the infidels. However, in this story, it can be known that women have a significant share in the war by raising swords against the infidels. This woman also gave assurances to one of Demak's leaders at the time: "Stay here, there is no fear for you anymore because I am a student of Sunan Bonang, he often comes here to visit me. Sunan Bonang's ethics will come yesterday then I will ask you for forgiveness and I guarantee your safety from the people of Demak government." [32] Women will not obtain such a strategic role if Sunan Bonang does not provide a strategic place in the system of government, at least the village-level government, in this case, Ngepun village located in Jatinegoro in the Tuban area, where there is Sunan Bonang there.

#### **4.2 Female Discrimina**

Abul Fadlol also sent the discrimination to women in his work. The patriarchal system and male domination of women also appear in this work. Like the family structure, women are positioned as creatures that men must obey. A wife must be fully obedient to her husband. Abul Fadlol tells the story of a female character named Condrowulan. She is a beautiful, rich, and obedient

woman to her husband, Sayyid Ibrahim As-Samara. Condrowulan's obedience to her great husband seemed to align with his obedience to Allah [32].

Women are also still seen as beings created as sexual objects. Wandan Kuning is an ugly woman and commoner who must marry the king of Brawijaya forced to recover from his paralysis. From this marriage was born a child named Bondan Kejawen. Because she was an ugly commoner woman, Brawijaya finally expelled Wandan Kuning and her son from the kingdom so that both were forced to live in the house of a farmer in Karang Jambu. Bondan Kejawen was forced to change his name to Sapi Peteng not to be known as the son of King Brawijaya [32].

Women are portrayed as not having the slightest right to choose their future husbands. Women, in this case, are nothing but objects that can be owned and moved according to the will of men, whether husband, parents or family. As a parent, Brawijaya offered his daughters as compensation gifts to King Pendito and Raden Rahmat not to leave his kingdom. Brawijaya promised to marry any of his daughters if the two abandoned their intention to return to Campo [32].

As king, Brawijaya also married two women of air, Martaningrum and Condro Wulan. She married him because she was attracted to her beauty. Polygamy was the culture of the kings at that time: Campa, Majapahit, Padjajaran, and Demak. In the cultural realm of the Campa kingdom, the King of Campa also performs polygamy. Sunan Ampel married Samirah daughter Husain and remarried with Maskarimah daughter Kibengkuning [32]. King of Pajajaran also practised polygamy [32].

## 5. CONCLUSION

Abul Fadlol is well able to portray Nusantara women as women who have a significant role in various fields, not only in domestic areas. Abul Fadlol realized that the patriarchal budaya inherent in society requires attention so that women are no longer considered subordinate human beings who are not symmetrical with men. Society should stay away from the mindset of men who make women objects to fulfil lust only. Abul Fadlol revealed that the roles played by women at that time included roles in the field of education by providing facilities to men in the field of politics. The story in Abul Fadlol's 1381 H or about 56 years ago provides an overview of various portraits, including portraits of the relationship between women and men who are still lame in the perspective of feminism.

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